

WASHINGTON, D. C.:
CITY OF SUNLIGHT, CITY OF SHADE

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During a six-week stay in Washington, D. C., I acquired the usual tourist's conception of the nation's capital. The images of lighted monuments, the Smithsonian exhibits on everything from diamonds to dinosaurs, and the impressive pageantry of the convening of the House or Senate combine within my mind to form a jumbled composite picture of the city. Because I lived in the inner city, however, I also saw a part of Washington most tourists don't visit. Instead of lighted monuments and beautiful buildings, I saw the broken sidewalks and crowded tenements of the inner city slum. Having a more realistic conception of the city as a whole, then, I saw the District of Columbia as a city of paradoxes, a place at one time as hopeful and bright as the sunlight which shone on the white granite buildings and as frighteningly dark as the sinister forces that have made that city one of the crime centers of the United States.

Each morning as I walked to work, I tried to take a new route so as to see more of the Capitol Hill area where I lived. Perhaps it was because of the early morning sun and the refreshing blue sky over my head, or the patterns of sunlight which sifted down through the tree-shaded walk to dance along the sidewalk in front of me, but I always made that walk with a mingled feeling of joy and awe. Musing to myself as I passed silently through the landscaped grounds of the Capitol, I often marveled at the minute planning which seemed to have gone into each facet of the nation's capital. I had already learned that the city was carefully plotted to encompass an exact ten-mile area, and after riding the buses a few days I learned that the city was divided into four quadrants as well. Tree-lined streets and the impressive Supreme Court Building and the Capitol, both modeled after classical structures, made the governmental area impressive and served as proof of the meticulous planning which had been done to insure the aesthetic quality of the site. Freshly-trimmed green lawns surround the Capitol, offering a resting place for weary visitors as well as a natural lunchroom for employees in the congressional offices. The masses of blooming flowers in beds and planters throughout the grounds provide a striking contrast to the white sandstone and granite Capitol. Since new varieties are trans-

planted with each new season, the flowers bloom throughout the spring, summer, and fall. At the steps of the Capitol stand the ever-present security guards, smilingly tipping their hats to young girls and adding their watchful eye to the carefully tended scene.

But a city characterized by careful planning, Washington, D.C., also manages to exhibit the seemingly careless inner city deterioration found in all urban areas. Within only a few blocks of the Capitol, for instance, lies a part of the city that differs considerably from Capitol Hill. The run-down brick tenements of the D. C. slums contain no marble or granite, nor are they tended by any save the occupants who can afford to do so. Long ago forsaken by the city, the crumbling steps and peeling paint of the buildings show none of the meticulous care given to the tourist's part of Washington. Only the people who sit and stare from open, curtainless windows and sagging porches offer any proof that this part of Washington is as much a part of the city as is the Washington of Capitol Hill.

During my stay I saw, too, that the District of Columbia was at the same time a hub of growth and development and a place of stagnation and decay. On my way to work I could never cross the street without dodging the rubble and machinery which gave evidence of the work being done on the Metro, a new underground mass transit system developed to meet the needs of a growing city. Construction materials and scaffolding blocked the sidewalks, and the rumble of cranes signaled the tremendous amount of construction going on in the already crowded city.

A short walk into the "other Washington" also led to broken sidewalks and streets holding an accumulation of rubble, but in the D. C. slums this is the debris of decay rather than a sign of growth. The people who live in this part of Washington are not involved in the decision-making processes of a nation or even of the District of Columbia itself. Ignored both by the federal administration and the municipal government, the slum areas illustrate the stagnation found even within a modern, growing Washington, D.C.

The concerns and interests of the people of the two sectors of the city differ markedly, too. The people who live in the slum sections of D.C. are primarily the Black Americans who make up over ninety percent of the city's population. Impotent insofar as their government is concerned, these people are more worried about how they can feed and clothe their families than whether or not H.R. 1106 is passed in the Senate.

In contrast to these relatively impotent Americans in the capital city are those people who form the basic governmental work force and serve as the forces behind the Presidents, Representatives, and Senators we elect. Commuting by bus or car from their residential homes in Maryland or Virginia, these people exude an air of confidence in their brisk walk and knowing manner. Carrying stuffed briefcases and the inevitable *Washington Post*, they move with purpose, confident in the knowledge that they are necessary cogs in the power machine of a nation. The alert expressions on their faces make evident the intelligence and drive which seem to characterize those who enter the political scene. Rather than experiencing a feeling of impotence, these people have felt the power of being in the position to know on Monday the facts the media will release to the general public on Wednesday, and they have experienced the feeling of accomplishment that comes from having been able to contribute, even to a small extent, to the day-to-day functioning of government.

Surely the real Washington, D.C. must lie somewhere between the stark reality of the filthy liquor store, barred at the windows and subjected to repeated arson and robbery attempts, and the relative fantasy world seen by the tourist, clutching kids and Kodak Instamatic, who sees the Washington of the guidebooks. Crime, squalor, and governmental indifference are as much a fact of life in the District of Columbia as are the governmental institutions and monuments built by and for our nation's forefathers. With its blend of the harsh reality of the present and the dreams of the past, Washington, D. C. is truly a city of intriguing contrasts.

It is not easy to find happiness in ourselves, and impossible to find it elsewhere.

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